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Yasmin swings on the green

STEPHEN NG

For years, her cheery patter on radio has been like a 'wake-up call' for many Malaysians but lately not much is heard of radio deejay Yasmin Yusuff. STEPHEN NG finds out she has polishing her strokes elsewhere...

CLASPING the golf club with both hands, Yasmin Yusuff bends slightly forward and prepares to throw a professional swing at the ball resting on the green turf, while golf buddy, Nancie Foo waits patiently for her turn.

The two former Miss Malaysia beauty queens have earned themselves the nickname "The Beauty Queen Flight" among fellow golfers at The Royal Selangor Golf Club in Kuala Lumpur. Occasionally, another former Miss Malaysia, Datin Fauziah Haron joins their game.

With a golf handicap of 25, Yasmin says: "Although I have been brought up in a golfing family (Dad was and is still an avid golfer), I did not have as much time previously as now to go golfing in the mornings. It's only lately that I can find the time to play with Nancie on weekdays, at least three times a week, and with my husband every Sunday."

When she was doing the Morning Breakfast Shows, Yasmin (**left**) used to wake up as early as 4.45am to get to the station. Her chirpy, "GOOD M-O-R-N-I-N-G, Morning, Morning..." won her a great following during the golden days of Malaysia's Radio Four. But, she says, she now has the luxury of waking up only at six to go for a game of golf.

"It's not because I have nothing to do, but there is no need to wake up that early since my last radio show on WOWfm went off the air on December 16, 2003," she says. "These days, since we tee off so early, we are done by 9am and I can go straight to work!"

The station was closed when the company wanted to start WAfm, a Chinese language station.

But Yasmin has been busy, has been taking on numerous emceeing jobs, both locally and overseas, as well as talk shows, voice-overs and television movies. One of her recent emceeing jobs was for a special wedding in Bali.

Her voice is also heard over the Public Address Systems and elevators in many buildings. The next time you ride the aerotrain at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, that will be her making those announcements.

"The past two years have been a busy time for me," she says, adding that she has also taken on corporate training for major organisations like RTM to train deejays and programme managers. She also provides corporate training on emcee and media skills.

One of her most recent projects included hosting celebrity cocktails and teas during the grand opening of Starhill Gallery for nine consecutive days. She also did the Fashion Week at Suria KLCC and the recent launch of MiTV cable TV station. She also emceed the welcome dinner at the recent 50th Asia Pacific Film Festival.

The recent tsunami tragedy had Yasmin doing numerous charity jobs to help raise funds for the victims in Indonesia.

Yet, she still manages to find time for golf. "Yes, while I still have the opportunity to improve on my golfing skills, I will try to play as regularly as possible," muses Yasmin, who confides that she plans to return to the airwaves in the very near future.

"I shan't say anything more but it could be as early as next month or perhaps in January," she says. "Hopefully, it will be a pleasant surprise for my fans who have been urging me to go back and entertain them every morning. There is, at last, something to look forward to! Meanwhile, it's golf, please, and nothing else!"

So, two or three times a week, Yasmin rises with the birds at 6.20am and takes the short, breezy drive from her home in Ampang to the golf club. "The game usually starts at seven and ends at nine as Nancie has to go to work," she explains. On weekends, Yasmin may play with more people, including Nancie's 12 and 10-year-old daughters respectively.

Occasionally too, she plays with Harith Iskander and Hans Isaac but husband Amarjit Chhina - a former investment banker with Barclay de Zoet Wedd (BZW) and now executive director of YTL e-Solutions - is her favourite golf buddy every Sunday morning.

The couple, who celebrated their first wedding anniversary recently, met at a private dinner and tied the knot on September 10, 2004.

"Playing golf with Amarjit is the best excuse I have to spend more time with him. Otherwise, even though we live in the same house, we could be doing two different things at the same time and not spending time together," she says. "On the golf course, our focus is on the ball and on each other and we have fun chatting with each other."

Interestingly, Yasmin plays left-handed. "Yes, I consequently face in the opposite direction to everyone else when I hit the ball!" she says. "My smart Alecky friends on the next fairway will shout 'Oi! Wrong way!' when they see me address the ball. Naturally, my heroes, apart from Tiger (Woods), are 'lefties' Phil Mickelson and Mike Weir. It is always absolutely megacool when they win big time!"

Yasmin lets on that she hasn't always been playing this way. "I started out playing right handed till one day when my Dad noticed that I kept missing the ball," she recalls. "He took me out to the back garden where he had a practice net, gave me a broomstick, turned me the other way and asked me to hit the ball. I hit every single one!"

From then on, there was no looking back. "There are quite a few of us. Why, there is even a special tournament held in the USA for left-handed golfers!" she says.

Since she started playing so frequently, Yasmin says her skill has improved. "For once, I managed to beat Amarjit, and I am now going all out to beat both Harith and Hans. Let's wait and see!" she exclaimed enthusiastically.

In golf, she adds, no one is too good to improve. "Look at Tiger. He changed and improved his swing over the years that he had been playing professional golf."

She says her Dad, 76, is still her number one coach. "He has had two holes-in-one in his years of golfing, and I admit that I have never thought of beating him at golf. He is such a great player that he can play a whole round with just one club. At best, I hope to get a birdie or at least a couple of pars for every round."

Golfing brings out a person's true character, observes Yasmin. "Dad always tells me to slow down, but I always forget his advice. Until now, he is still my coach and I cannot beat him!" she adds with a laugh.

What she enjoys most about golfing is the fact that she gets to walk a few kilometres on green grass amidst the lush green trees of over 100 years at the Royal Selangor Golf Club.

"You get to listen to birds chirping and you see the dew on the grass before the sun rises. I feel so close to nature and it's so beautiful being awake early in the morning," she says.

"Golf is a great leveler too. You see CEOs and other VIPs in their golf pants while for more formal functions, they would be wearing their three-piece suits. I often get asked to emcee golf tournament prize-giving ceremonies and it's just great to see everyone laughing and joking, no matter what their background or positions in society are. That's the beauty of the game."

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